Citing a 2004 assessment by the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission, this volume’s editor, Peter C. Y. Chow, argues in the introduction that recent changes on both sides of the Taiwan Strait require “a rigorous and critical review” (p. 5) of the “one China policy” of the United States. The volume then goes on to review some aspects of these changes in fourteen essays arranged according to four topics; “Historical Legacies and Taiwan’s Statehood,” “Taiwan Identity Amid the Rising China,” “The Dilemma of ‘One China’ Policy,” and “National Security and Defense Strategy.”

Although Chow does not provide either a sufficiently clear or nuanced picture of what exactly the “one China policy” of the United States is, it is obvious from the beginning that he believes that pursuing a policy of support for the status quo in the area is inconsistent with the promotion of global democracy by the George W. Bush administration and creates a “crisis situation in the Taiwan Strait [that] has been underestimated, consciously or unconsciously, by policymakers in Washington” (p. 12). American policy, Chow contends, should support Taiwan’s admission to the United Nations and allow the people of the island “to determine their own destiny” (p. 13)—a determination that, given the growth of Taiwan nationalism, would likely bring independence, in his view.

The “one China policy” has, of course, been the subject of considerable discussion. While this reviewer believes that, on balance, it is the preferred policy, there is undoubtedly a need for a critical discussion of its premises and consequences. However, the largely unsubstantiated assumptions put forth in the introduction—that Washington underestimates the crisis situation; that Taiwan’s admission to the United Nations would provide the United States with “more leverage to administer a cross-strait policy” (p. 13); or that President Bush’s policies “repress democratization in Taiwan” (p. 13)—neither provide a promising beginning for such a discussion nor lay out a framework for the essays that follow. However, that might be too much to ask of a very short introductory essay. Do the subsequent chapters address some of the changes that the introduction speaks of?

Well, yes and no.

Clearly, the most useful sections are those concerned with identity and the military balance. Two chapters, the first by Hans Stockton and the second by Shiao-Chi Shen and Naiteh Wu, do an excellent job of introducing the reader to the complexities of the identity issue. These are well-done and nuanced discussions that caution against easy generalizations about the nature of the divisions within the island and the consequences of a growing Taiwan identity for relations with the mainland. Indeed, while the latter chapter finds that Taiwan identity has clearly grown in the last decade, the authors also argue that “the force of Taiwanese nationalism seems to have reached a point
of stagnation,” with the “largest plurality of the population” (p. 119) still open to the possibility of either independence or unification; the strongest consensus is the insistence that, whatever the outcome, the people of Taiwan must decide. In their view, then, the maintenance of the status quo is consistent with the growth in Taiwan identity.

In the section on the cross-strait military balance, Richard Fisher, Jr. provides a useful cataloging of the increasingly unfavorable situation facing Taiwan’s defenders as a result of the mainland’s buildup during the past decade. Although Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang seeks to qualify certain aspects of the threat outlined by Fisher, he also recognizes the extent of the challenge and explores Taiwan’s defensive options, as does the chapter by York W. Chen.

Other essays include fairly conventional overviews of Taiwan’s history (for example, J. Bruce Jacobs on “Colonial History and Postcolonial Nationalism,” and the late Edward L. Dreyer on “The Myth of ‘One China’”) that stress Taiwan’s distinctive historical development and its more distant relationship with the mainland. In addition, there are chapters in which the authors apply paradigms they have developed in other contexts to issues of cross-strait relations. Suisheng Zhao, for example, depicts the Anti-Secession Law of 2005 as an example of the “pragmatic nationalism” of the Chinese leadership that has produced a Taiwan policy “based on careful calculation of China’s national interests” (p. 211), while Lowell Dittmer applies the “strategic triangle” to the Taiwan–China–U.S. relationship.

As must be clear by now, most essays in this volume are not simply overviews. They reflect a clear point of view regarding certain elements of the “one China” issue. However, in two cases—Arthur Waldron on Richard Nixon and Taiwan and Edward Friedman on Europe’s “one China” policy—the authors’ eagerness to present an argument results in discussions that do not do full justice to the subject under consideration. Waldron’s somewhat tendentious chapter seems more intent on demonstrating Nixon and Henry Kissinger’s perfidy in dealing with the Taiwan issue, the flaws in the latter’s approach to diplomacy, and their failure to anticipate future eventualities (such as the fall of the Soviet Union) than on illuminating the complex issues surrounding the question of Taiwan during the early period of the Sino-American rapprochement.

Edward Friedman stresses the economic interests of the European countries. The result is a chapter that provides a somewhat one-dimensional and overgeneralized picture of the continent’s more complex attitude toward China and Taiwan, a complexity that has been reflected in recent developments.

A final word about what is missing in this volume: There is no section on the economic relationship between the mainland and Taiwan. If, as the editor suggests, this study is intended to take account of recent changes, then this topic surely deserves more complete treatment.

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